

Shane's French passion

It's Shane Newland's pride and joy - the Renault Clio he's lovingly restored during time off from his job as a car mechanic.

"I'm a practical person so working at the garage is just about the ideal job for me," he says. "The Clio's taken a lot of time and effort to get it looking the way it does. I'm pretty chuffed with the way it's turned out."

Shane admits that he and school didn't really get on. "I just couldn't be bothered with it. Learning in a classroom just didn't suit my nature. Looking back, I must have been quite a difficult kid to deal with."

He was 15 when he first walked through the door of The Learning Link. He'd wanted a trade since he was a young boy and decided

he needed to improve his maths to get on as a car mechanic and to help his grandfather, Andy Newlands, who runs a vehicle recovery business.

Three years on and he's well on the way to gaining a maths qualification, having successfully passed three assessments with just one more to go.

Shane says he enjoys his weekly sessions with a volunteer tutor at the Link - even if he sometimes thinks his head is throbbing as he gets to grips with graphs and flow charts!

"There's a real buzz about the place," he says. "We created a bit of a stir ourselves one night, when we made cheesecake in the kitchen to learn about numbers and weights and recipes. I think everyone was quite impressed by



Shane Newlands

the results.

"It's been great getting through the assessments. My tutor comes with me and sits outside while I'm doing the test at Orkney College. I think he feels more nervous than I do!

"I'm finding I understand maths a lot more than I used to do. I've

learned a lot and I'm determined to carry on until I get that bit of paper with my maths qualification.

"But if I feel the session has been going long enough - I can always take my tutor outside to see the latest work I've done on the Clio."

Why did you come to The Learning Link?

I left school with no qualifications and to get on the course I wanted, I needed help with numeracy so I came here to get help. I was very lucky to get help and sit the tests within 3 to 4 months.

That was quick.

Very quick, good teaching you see.

You must have been very determined?

Yes, I was, that is one of my strengths. When I set my mind to something I'm very focussed and motivated about what I want.

What were you aiming for?

I wanted to get on this course to get up my career ladder.

When I got the numeracy qualifications I had an interview and was lucky enough to get offered a place on the course.

What does luck have to do with it when you worked really hard?

I think when you've gone through school and not gotten anywhere, you do put yourself down a little bit, but getting the maths qualifications I could prove to myself that I could do this.

You were putting yourself down?

Yes, I had to prove to myself I could do it. Well, I got on the course and then the next challenge was to write an essay and I thought I don't know how to put that together, how to structure it. So I came to The Learning Link again to get help with this. I learned about essay writing and as the assignments grew I gradually got better at writing them.

As I went through the course the essays got harder and had to include lots of evidence.

Up close and personal

with one of our former students

It's the old saying, the more you do something, the better you get at it. My first essays were pretty basic, but I got better at them and they became more complex. Me, writing complex essays - it's hard to believe!

What happened then?

My course was four years and in the middle of it my marks starting going down a bit and I didn't really know why this was. One of my tutors noticed there was something not quite right about the way I was writing and she asked if I would mind being tested for dyslexia. That came as a bit of a shock.

I put myself down and thought maybe I'm just a bit stupid and not getting it. The course was getting harder each year.

I went for the test and they discovered that I had difficulty separating out words. What I would see was just one long line of words joined together. So my eyes and my brain had to separate out each word and this was extremely hard work.

After I was diagnosed I was given equipment to sort out this problem and help me read better.

I use Read Write Gold which reads out what

you have written so I could spot my mistakes.

What age were you when you were diagnosed?

Well, let's just say late thirties. I've had this difficulty all these years and it wasn't until my late thirties that it was discovered.

Has the diagnosis made things easier for you?

Oh yes! Not just the reading, but understanding myself as a person. Now, I'm not bothered by asking those I work with just to go through something with me - I'm open about the fact I am dyslexic. I have the confidence now. It was a bit in shock to be told I had it (dyslexia) to be honest - on the other hand it was a relief to know that I wasn't just stupid.

The other thing I have found and one of the tutors at The Learning Link told me this that a dyslexic brain goes the long way round. So that most people will go from A to B and so on, but with me I might start at A (and I might not!) then wander away to E!! But I get there in the end.

I'm in a career that involves life long learning and so the journey carries on day to day. And now I have my reading equipment I've discovered I'm inquisitive and I want to learn more.

If someone found themselves in a similar situation to you - not actually knowing they were dyslexic - what advice would you give them?

I would say follow your dream. Don't put yourself down because there is help out there and you just have to ask. There's equipment out there which is fabulous and really makes a difference. With a little bit of determination you will achieve what you set out to do. I did.

Address: 1, St Rognvald Street, Kirkwall • Telephone: 01856 879200
Email: patricia.hartley@thelearninglink.org.uk • Website: www.thelearninglinkorkney.co.uk

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NEWSLINK

High hopes for new career destination

The start for Catherine Rowe was learning about maths and English, but the real beginning was her tutor's faith in her abilities and nurturing her fragile confidence.

Catherine, a slim, vivacious lady, has turned her back on thinking she can't do something, to making big plans for her future.

"I was so shy and I didn't think I was important enough for anyone to listen to me," said Catherine.

"I'd been in the same job for 10 years and I thought this was going to be me for the rest of my life."

Coming to The Learning Link for the first time took real courage for Catherine.

"I thought the centre was for other people, not people like me. But since coming through the door I can honestly say I'm a changed woman!"

Catherine can trace her transformation from the first meeting with her tutor.

"Here was someone who, with gentle persuasion, showed me what I could

do. She believed in me and gave me the time and the space to develop," said Catherine.

"For so many years I was told I wasn't good enough and I wouldn't achieve anything."

"Now I've changed my job, I've just passed my first year exams for my distance learning course, which is a professional qualification for air cabin crew, and I've been driving for nearly a year now," she said.

"My dream is to train as air cabin crew and I believe I'm going to get there."

Catherine, who has been working with her tutor Lesley for nearly two years, had no idea where this learning journey was going to take her.

"At the beginning there were a few tears but it was Lesley's belief in me that has had such a massive impact."

"People, family and friends have noticed a dramatic improvement in me. I have so much confidence and can see so many other career options now."

"I want to take this opportunity to

encourage people like me, to take the plunge," added Catherine.

"Just walk through the door and enjoy the ride!"



Catherine Rowe

WHO COMES TO THE LEARNING LINK?

This is the question asked by many of our students and the answer is simple: Anyone can.

Anyone who has come through our door, picked up the phone or emailed us, knows our response to their queries is answered with warmth, empathy and an enthusiastic assurance that we can help.

We help people who want to improve their English, maths or basic computer skills. We respond to requests from local schools with pupils who need a special kind of help. For example,

the Polish teenager, who needed an intense programme of English to ensure success in his up-coming exams. Another youngster is spending three days a week with us with over the summer, so he can catch up on his English, maths and learn about the driving theory test.

Working with Stromness Academy, we were able to devise and design leaflets encouraging parents with children going into secondary education, to seek our help if they needed it.

Older people, who missed out on

the technological advances of computers, have gained an insight into the workings of email and the internet, enabling them to keep in touch with families, as well as opening a new window on the world.

People who have found themselves without work for the first time in years, have joined our special job skill workshops and have gained new employment.

Young mothers, who have spent years bringing up their children and now feel a bit left behind and lacking in confidence, regain

their belief in themselves.

Migrant workers - from the fish factories, hotels and restaurants to people in the marine renewables field - can get expert tuition from qualified staff at a time and pace to suit their busy lifestyles. We engage with local employers to set up free ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) lessons on their premises on a day and at a time which suits shift patterns.

So who comes to The Learning Link? Anyone can - and they do.

Foreign Affairs

This year has been busy on the ESOL front: Michael's Tuesday evening class has continued with a stable core of students, mostly from Eastern Europe, but with one Italian student who has just been accepted to research for a PhD at Exeter University...so congratulations and best wishes to Antonio!

Our ESOL tutor, Fiona Craighead, is running a class at The Link on Monday evenings and we have restarted classes in Stromness on a Tuesday afternoon which Fiona also takes. There is the possibility of a more advanced class starting in the autumn in Stromness as well, so this is good news, and we are really grateful to Fiona for her hard work keeping all this going.

Back at The Learning Link, Pattie is looking after the Far East connection, with a class for students from the two Chinese restaurants in Kirkwall on Tuesday afternoon, and a smaller class for Chinese beginners on Wednesdays....these classes colloquially known as Chinese 1 and Chinese 2!

We now have our youngest ESOL student so far: Irene from Galicia in Spain who is 15, and currently living in Orkney. Irene is taking part in a team teaching experiment in intensive English learning, coming to The Learning Link four days a week, with one day in Stromness with Fiona's class. So far she seems to be surviving the experience very well. Michael tries out his rudimentary Spanish and acting skills on her, and when all else fails, we use bits of Italian, French and Latin as well!!! Well, European languages are quite closely related, so if it helps, why not?

Somebody once said that ESOL teaching is 99% pantomime, so if you were a fly on the wall at The Learning Link on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, you would see just how true this is....

A County Show to remember

This was a first for The Learning Link - pitching our tent and setting out our wares - at the County Show. Our idea was to let people know, in person, what help we could offer them with reading, writing, spelling, basic computing, maths and anything else they might need! It was also an opportunity to tout for some potential volunteer tutors to swell our ranks.

Support Workers Chrissie Matthews and Robin Jamieson-Caley were at the helm, planning, budgeting, organising and liaising. The marquee and surrounds were a credit to all their enthusiasm and hard work. They also invited our colleagues at Community Learning and Development (CLD) and Careers Scotland to share 'our space' and together we were a formidable team!

Rosie Alexander, formally of Careers Scotland takes up the story:

"The Learning Link stand had a fabulous range of activities both inside and outside, and the sweet-jewellery and face painting were particularly popular.

"Soon there were queues of people waiting to be decorated or make jewellery so we took the opportunity to chat with them about their interests, work and learning.

"Working alongside The Learning Link and CLD team was great and we had such fun," said Rosie.

Chrissie, never missing an opportunity for cheap solutions, soon had a rota organised so the marquee was manned for the entire day with Support Workers, volunteer tutors and our adult students.

"People were so generous, not just with their time, but went all out to make sure

our marquee attracted large crowds," said Chrissie.

"The face painting and making jewellery from sweets was hugely popular with families.

"It enabled adults to browse inside our tent while the youngsters were being decorated or making jewellery.

"The day was made extra special because of all the hard work (and no mean artistic talent) of Susan Mooney and her daughter Shannon who worked tirelessly, without even a break, for the whole day," she said.

"And special thanks also to Jack Drever and Sandra Coltherd who went beyond the call of duty and stayed with us for most of the day," said Chrissie.

And the highlight of the day?



You had to 'bee' there! Joyce Slater (left) manager of Skills Development Scotland and Rosie Alexander talking to a giant bee.

"We talked to a lot of people and one giant bumble bee! Talking to a bee about its career plans and aspirations has to be a highlight in anyone's day," added Rosie.

BASIC INSTINCTS!

Having been retired for several years I decided that I quite fancied being able to do a bit more computing. A friend mentioned that tuition was available at The Learning Link, tho' I had never heard of the place, but on making enquiries through the council, me and another person started a basic computing course.

We were both made very welcome and got personal tutoring in how to send emails, word processing and searching the web. This has opened a completely different pastime for me and it's amazing what garden questions you can get answered. A really worthwhile course and I have and will recommend it to anyone who has the interest and the time.

I was keen to learn basic computer skills but couldn't see myself attending evening classes or as part as a big group.

Then I heard very positive comments about 'The Learning Link' so I went along and was made very welcome by everyone there.

Our tutor was simply the best: she had great patience and understanding.

I can now send and receive emails, use the internet with confidence and much more.

The Learning Link provides an excellent service.

By former Learning Link ICT students

Poet's Corner

An Elderly Farmer

An elderly farmer from out Rendall way
Retired and moved in to Kirkwall to stay.
He was really unsure if the move would be right
The first time he looked out and saw all the lights.
He had seen them before from long miles away
And never once thought he would move there one day
But now this is home he has got settled in
In a nice quiet street well away from the din
The worst outside sound is the noise from the lum
As the wind from the west works up to a hum
Every once in a while a 'boy racer' roars past
At high speed of course, so the noise does not last

The Learning Link

Tae try tae help wir 'puter skills, wae tried the folk at Learning Link.
They wir patient as they jogged us on tae try tae help what we had known.
We fuffed around an meed mistakes, but learned a lot on every tae.
Their patience wis beyond belief, much tae our profound relief.

B Baikie

This is Orkney calling ... This is Orkney calling ...

Technology and Pattie are not natural bedfellows, so it was with some alarm that colleagues at The Learning Link listened to her proposal to link the volunteer tutor training course here in Kirkwall with an Orcadian living in Nelson. Nelson, New Zealand that is!

Pattie was half way through her Adult Literacies degree and had come to the topic of distance learning. She wanted to test the theories of the effectiveness of learning through technology and so chose, not only the hectic Saturday mornings of the tutor training course, but opted to include someone from the other side of the world.

Testing theories at a distance is one thing, but testing a hypothesis in different time zones was surely a bit ambitious, even for The Learning Link. But as Pattie's enthusiasm for the plan grew,

the rest of us caught the bug and had to learn new ways of teaching seven people in one room with Caroline (Budge) on the pc screen 12,000 miles away.

Using the Glow Meet system, set up by the council's IT department, we were able to successfully link with Caroline 10 out of the 12 sessions. We encountered a few technical niggles along the way, but these were overcome with ingenuity and a few spare pieces of wire!

At the start of the course Caroline was 11 hours ahead of us, so what to us was Saturday morning, to her was 9 o'clock in the evening. As the course wore on, Caroline would begin on Saturday evening but end it in the early hours of Sunday morning.

It was a testament to Caroline's stamina, her commitment to the training, her

determination to overcome technical difficulties (and her ability to stay awake) which made the whole project such a success.

"I'd always wanted to do adult literacy training," said Caroline. "And here was Pattie in Orkney wanting to include me (in New Zealand) in her training course.

"It was good fun and it was so lovely hearing all those Orcadian accents.

"The people on the course and those teaching us made me feel part of the group and I learned so much," added Caroline.

Each session has quite a lot of handouts, worksheets and activities but Linda (admin suprema at the Link) made sure Caroline was well prepared for each session, emailing all the materials in good time.



Caroline Budge

And can you overcome distance, time (and space)? We think the experiment was a resounding success as the group (with Caroline) understood and appreciated the whole ethos of adult literacies.

Would we do it again? Well, there could be someone on an island closer to home, who might want to join the new tutor training course, which begins on Saturday, 25th September.